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ABSTRACT

The author describes the model of social behavior in a social system first framed by Jacob Getzels, with the assistance of Egon Guba, in the middle 1950s. Significant changes in the conceptualization of organizational functioning have occurred in the years since then, though the methodological processes for studying that functioning have remained relatively stable. Getzels' contribution to the development of these new conceptualizations consisted of making substantial revisions in his original model. These revisions accommodated trends toward thinking of organizations as open rather than closed systems. The author comments on scholarly reactions to Getzels' models and touches on the possible reasons behind the tendency for Getzels' revisions to receive less attention or acclaim than his first model. (Author/PGD)

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GETZELS MODEL

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The serious study of educational administration and the development of its dominant theoretical model had common beginnings in time and place. The theory movement sent down particularly strong roots in the Department of Education at the University of Chicago in the mid-1950's. It was there and then that Jacob Getzels, a social psychologist, framed his now-famous model of social behavior in a social system (with the assistance of Egon Guba who was one of his graduate students). The dominance of Chicago as a center of inquiry and graduate training in educational administration over the following two decades was related closely to these historical facts.

Pre-eminence is more widely distributed today. Research into the nature and effects of educational administration is conducted by scholars in many universities and non-academic locations. Nonetheless, the Getzels model is perhaps the one construct applied to educational administration that remains widely familiar both to university professors and to field practitioners who were prepared in the past quarter century. The study and practice of educational administration seem to have changed significantly as these twenty-five years have passed, but can the same be said for the premier model in the field?

The most significant alteration in the study of educational administration in the quarter century since the Getzels model was advanced has been conceptual rather than methodological. Schools and school districts and many other educational institutions typically are viewed now as open systems. The shift in the viewpoint of academia from closed to open systems as the premise for the study of organisms and organizations has been pervasive in the natural sciences as well as the behavioral sciences. Of course, a cynical, veteran school superintendent might point out that

his school system was not now "open" just because a professor or two had said so, and to be certain there may always be historical lag between what educational administrators know and do and when scholars find out what they know and do. However, it can be said with some confidence that at this juncture the open systems perspective is held commonly by the vast majority of researchers and practitioners in the field of educational administration.

One way of sensing the change that has taken place is to recall what happened in social psychology, a discipline that has contributed much to theory and research concerned with educational administration. Two of its leading figures, Katz and Kahn, were criticizing closed system theory in 1966 (p. 29):

> Traditional organizational theorists have tended to view the human organization as a closed system. This tendency has led to a disregard of differing organization environments and the nature of organizational dependency on environment. It has led also to an overconcentration on principles of internal organizational functioning, with consequent failure to develop and understand the processes of feedback which are essential to survival.

Twelve years later they could report a dramatic transformation (1978, p. iii):

> Our first edition championed the cause of the open system approach to the study of organizations. Today that point of view has gained wide acceptance in organizational research and theorizing. Research is no longer contained within the boundaries of a single organization but crosses those borders to deal with environmental forces, relationships with other systems, and the effects of organizations on individual members as human beings and members of the larger society. That social psychological principles can be applied to all forms of collective organized effort is now acknowledged in many disciplines.

A similar pattern can be discerned when we look at a major textbook in educational administration from this period--The organization and control of American schools. The theoretical backdrop of Campbell, Cunningham, and McPhee (1965) is similar to that of Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan (1980)

in several important respects: the school and society are seen to be in a reciprocal relationship; administrators are thought increasingly to be dependent upon the understandings of the social sciences; and institutional roles are used as an essential organizing thread for the book. This is hardly a closed system view. But where the earlier edition expresses the authors' concern for a balance between internal and external administration of the schools (an implicitly open view) the most recent edition provides stronger and more explicit support for open system theory (1980, p. 5-6):

> The perspective from which we view the organization and control of schools is that of open systems. This view emphasizes the interdependence between an organization and its environment...The open system perspective stands opposed to the literature which argues that schools traditionally have been bureaucratic systems which are non-responsive to their environment.

In its concluding chapter the authors add, "The open systems approach to administration has informed our analyses and in a sense this book represents an empirical test of the open systems concept in the area of education (p. 469)."

History is not neat in its transitions, of course. For instance, Campbell (1977-78) has summarized the evolution of administrative thought in this century through four major epochs--scientific management, human relations, structuralism (including closed system theory), and open systems. Most scholars would be quite comfortable with this intellectual ordering, and yet it is curious to see how difficult it is to pinpoint individuals and their ideas in these categories. For instance, Chester Barnard usually is associated with the human relations approach, yet Hodgkinson (1975, p. 22) observes that

> Barnard was a systems theorist before that appellation became widespread. His observations on information flow predate and presage the most modern findings. Nor does he at all neglect the decision function and process of the closed system theorists.

James March provides another example; his earlier work with Herbert Simon falls within the structural or closed systems view, but he is now a leading open systems theorist. Also, Talcott Parsons' discussions of social systems persistently emphasized both closed and open contexts. He seems to have developed the concept of "loose coupling" several decades before it had such a name. He spoke of the "qualitative breaks in the continuity of line structure (1960, p. 59)" and added that "this relative independence means that there is, at each linkage point, a range of possible different types of articulation (Ibid., p. 95)." Perhaps it is useful to remember that ideas do not spring forth spontaneously, as Aphrodite from the foam of the sea--they have a past, a present, and a future, and no historical summary can rationalize this complexity completely.

A second important development in the study of educational administration in recent years has been the loss of faith in the Holy Grail of grand theory. Campbell's historical synopsis was but one of a recent spate of articles and books devoted to an examination of the past, present, and future of the field (Cunningham, Hack, and Nystrand, 1977; Erickson, 1979; Griffiths, 1979; Immegart and Boyd, 1979; Boyan, 1981). Boyan's latest words provide a reasonably fair summary of the current situation (1981, p. 12):

> First, internal specialization has increasingly characterized inquiry. Second, the requirements do not exist for emergence of a new, single, synthesizing paradigm to guide research across the entire territory or even within any of the major specializations. Third, improvement in the states of the several arts has moved unevenly and modestly.

As the overarching view of the scholars and practitioners in the field has moved from closed to open theories, the prospects of collectively accepted guiding paradigms and theories have slipped further and further from grasp.

Such was not always the case, particularly during the heady days of

1955-65. Andrew Halpin (a colleague of Getzels at Chicago) edited one of the important volumes of the new wave of research in educational administration--Administrative theory in education. It was a compilation of papers presented at a 1957 conference sponsored jointly by the University Council for Educational Administration and the Midwest Administration Center at Chicago. Halpin's comments in the original introduction were quite tentative (1958, p. iii):

> We should have no illusions about where we stand. We are still just making feeble efforts toward the development of theory.

He somewhat casually termed the monograph (Ibid., p. xiv)

> a progress report by a few of us who have tried to grapple with the task of devising administrative theory. The fact that these formulations are not all polished to a high gloss does not stop us from sharing our ideas with you.

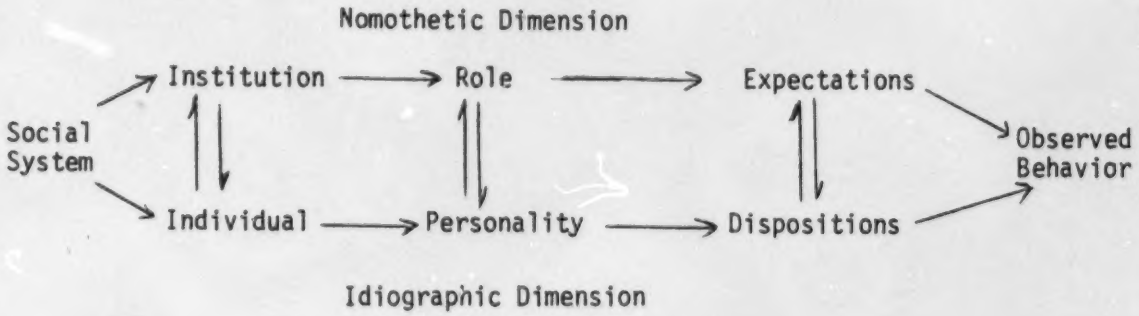
However, in an addendum to that introduction which was written nine years later for a new edition of the monograph, Halpin (1967, p. xv) described the same seminar more expansively:

> In 1957 the use of the theory-oriented research in educational administration was essentially a novel and hence an alien idea for most professors in the field; the papers here had a dramatic effect in opening up a new and highly rewarding research vistas.

Taken together, these commentaries by Halpin are a reasonably accurate set of parentheses around a remarkable decade in the development of educational administration as a field of study. The theory movement had progressed in that time from a tentative birth to a more confident childhood.

With the advantage of hindsight we can see that two chapters from Administrative theory in education were of special importance. One was "Some Ingredients of a General Theory of Formal Organization" in which Talcott Parsons described his classification of the organization into the technical, managerial, and institutional (or "community") levels. The second was

"Administration as a Social Process" by Jacob Getzels (see also Getzels and Guba (1957) for an early description of the basic model). The author noted that "we sought a model that was at once heuristic, operational, and



that had the elegance and power of parsimony (Getzels, 1957, p. 151)." This expectation was one that was largely realized. What Getzels had managed to capture in a simple (but hardly simplistic) model was the inescapable fact that administration in organizations involves both normative and personal elements. From the outset he believed that it is the latter set that is most significant. He observed that "administration always operates in an interpersonal--or, if you will, social relationship--that makes the nature of this relationship the crucial factor in the administrative process (1958, p. 151-152)." While the two dimensions of the model (with their curious but intriguing titles) were conceptually indpendent, they were phenomenally interactive. These ideas were not entirely new to Getzels (Bickimer (1968) has traced the intellectual lineage from Pareto to Parsons to Barnard to Getzels), but their presentation had rarely been clearer or more compelling. The original model had limitations, of course. Its emphasis on "observed behavior" (termed "social behavior" in later versions) reflected a particular bias of an emerging discipline enamored with the methodology of certain of the behavioral sciences. It is of some interest to note that Getzels'

most recent interest in problem finding, particularly as applied to the work of educational administrators (Getzels, 1979), represents his concern with the thought of educational administrators, a process that can not be observed and that must be examined by imaginative and indirect methods. A second (if temporary) liability of the original model was its tendency to focus the attention of scholars and practitioners on the internal organization. "We have tried to show that administration deals essentially with social behavior in a hierarchical setting (Getzels, 1958, p. 165)." The construct was not a determinedly closed systems model, but it coincided with a rush of inquiry in a field that largely had been prescriptive and hortatory, and it was natural that intially theory-building investigation would start at home, with internal school organization.

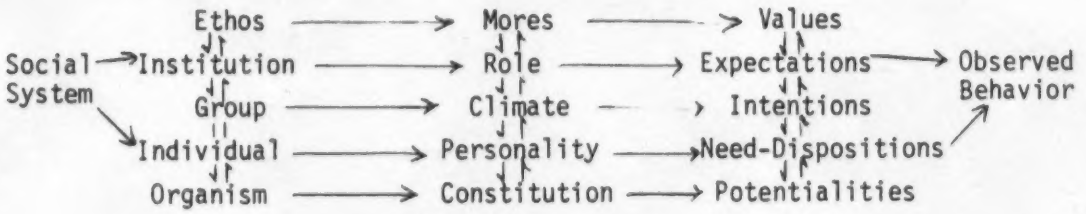
Getzels' most serious concern was reflected in the very first words he wrote about educational administration: "There is a conspicuous lack of systematic research in the field of educational administration (1952, p. 235)." He saw his task as proposing theoretical ideas that would stimulate research and permit an attack on problems in schools that cried out for solution (Ibid.):

> Systematic research requires the mediation of theory-theory that will give meaning and order to observations already made and that will specify areas where observations still need to be made. It is here that we would place the root of the difficulty in administration: there is a dearth of theory-making, and such theories as do exist have thus far proved unequal to the task of stimulating research.

Both in this initial article devoted to educational administration and his later monograph with Coladarci (1955) he emphasized three dimensions- authority, affectivity, and role- which would be reduced to two- normative and personal- in the original model.

That model was expanded almost immediately beyond its sociological and psychological dimensions into a more distinctively open form. Getzels and

Thelen (1960) added a biological dimension (accounting for constitutional as well as personalistic elements), an anthropological dimension (focusing on cultural terms and issues), and even a group dimension (surely the contribution of Thelen) which would mediate between the normative and personal dimensions of the model. The evolving model was somewhat complicated, and



and yet it profited from the additional possibilities which the authors envisioned (1960, p. 81):

> In so far as there is going to be a 'science' of education, it will be related to concepts, findings, and propositions from the whole range of disciplines called social science. It will be an integrative structure of ideas about the ways in which cultural, instititutional, group, individual, and organismic factors interact and, in the process of interaction, change and bring about change.

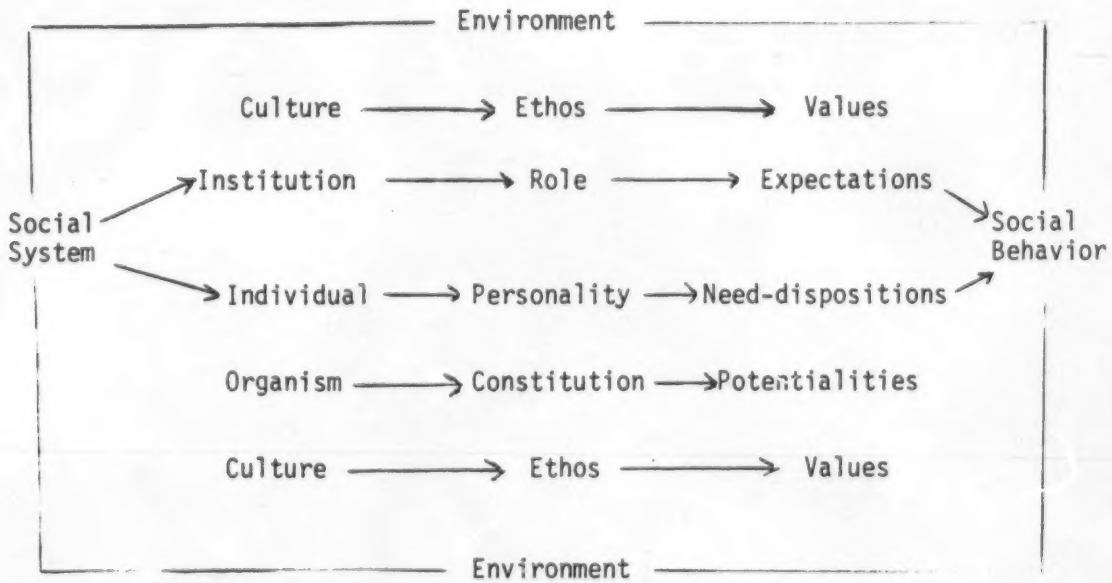
In effect, the revised model had defined the environment of the social systems more concretely; had related the issues of rationality, belongingness, and identification in the organizational setting; and had predicted the attention of additional disciplines to the study of education and educational administration which would characterize the 1970's. It is unfortunate that the "integrative structure of ideas" which was projected remains still beyond the reach and grasp of scholars in the field.

Within a few years Getzels (1963, 1968) had begun to make significant alterations in this more comprehensive model. The group dimension was discarded, but the cultural dimension was seen to be of increased importance

(Getzels et al., 1968, p. 104-105):

> The point we want to make here is that mediating between biological dimension and the personality dimension is the cultural dimension; just as role expectations are related to a context of value, so are personality dispositions related to a context of value.

In addition he began to distinguish between a general model and an operational model, the latter being seen as particularly useful in the study and practice of educational administration. The general model represented an open system with organismic, personalistic, institutional, and cultural elements arrayed in systematic interaction and set in an environmental context.

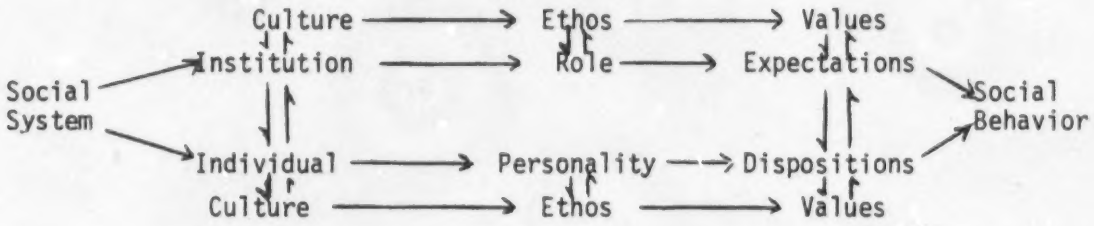


His operational model (1963, 1968) expressed his desire not only for parsimony and elegance in the construct itself, but his growing sense of the importance of the cultural dimension in understanding the operation of schools and school systems. He observed (1968, p. 106):

> Although the general model includes the five dimensions, which must be borne in mind when considering any element of social behavior, the basic operational model in the present analysis of administrative processes in the educational context is com-

> posed of these three salient factors: the interaction of role and personality in the context of value.

Here then was a working model designed to guide research and to clarify issues faced by practicing administrators. It suggested that the critical conflicts which an administrator must face and attempt to solve involve not



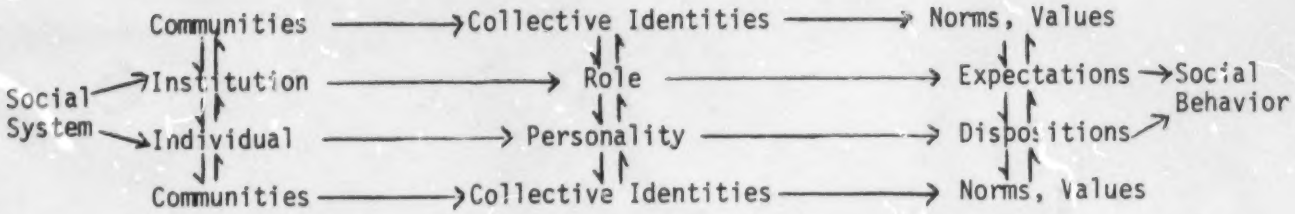
only role and personality (as the original model had proposed) but value as well, and that both the institution and individual must be viewed and understood in the context of culture. Getzels (as a social psychologist and not a political scientist) was specifying that the culture of the school and the culture of the child (to say nothing of the other factors in the school setting) are sometimes compatible (e.g., for the middle class child) and sometimes incompatible (e.g., for the poor child). The Getzels model thus had a particular relevance for educators who were coming to grips with this critical truth and dilemma of the 1960's.

However useful this extended model proved to be, its author recognized a specific limiation, and in the late 1970's a further (although possibly not final) revision was offered to scholars and practitioners (1978, p. 672):

> These formulations may now be seen as too monolithic and in need of refinement; they were based on the assumption of the self contained autonomous community, which, if it has not disappeared altogether, is the exception rather than the rule. It is closer to reality to think of the school and the child as embedded not in a single community but in a varity of communities--of communities within communities--whose impact fluctuates throughout the life span and even in the course of meeting day-to-day needs.

In its most recent configuration, the model makes much more concrete the cultural setting of the school as a social system, and, in doing so, extends it potential usefulness as an open system model. The model now characterizes

the interaction of community, institutional, and individual elements where six community categories are identified: (1) local community, (2) adminis-



trative community, (3) social community, (4) instrumental (or functional) community, (5) ethnic community, and (6) ideological community. These communities of education are not new but rather newly identified and related. As such they represent an important antidote to the educational administrator who speaks of a homogeneous "black community" or to the scholar concerned with an individual's ideological community to the exclusion of other community identifications.

The influence of these communities on educational organizations has increased steadily in the past quarter century even if the categories of community have been rather stable. The sophisticated and successful practicing administrator--college president or superintendent, dean or principal--will know and be able to work with communities of education, expressed as they are in various combinations in individuals who inhabit educational organizations; in the clients of the organization; and in the cultural contexts of the organizations themselves. The puzzling situation or dilemmas which are the sources of problems for institutions and their administrators are more typically rooted in the communities of education, in the external organization, and the revised model points the scholar and practitioner in this direction. As a result, tensions between and among these complicated communities of education must be taken into account as problems are defined and prioritized by administrators, and problem solutions must be framed in

forms that anticipate consequences for both the internal and external organizations.

As we look back then, at the twenty-five year history of this provocative social system model, we can address several questions. Why did the early model so dominate the field of educational administration? The circumstances of its origin are not unimportant. The University of Chicago was generally viewed as the source of leadership in the theory movement, in the beginnings of serious theoretical and investigative attention to educational administration, and the Getzels model was presented to the profession at a time when there were few serious competitors, just as the movement was developing clear momentum. Nonetheless, its attractiveness was related even more closely to the attributes of the model itself. The model was simple and clear, and it had a "rightness of fit" both for the university professor and the working administrator who were seeking means for relating social science constructs to field situations. That is, the model helped administrators understand their own experience and their own institutional settings. After all, many of the incombents in both these roles were being exposed to theoretical models for the first time, and the elegance of the Getzels model was captivating where the complexity of other models was puzzling. The Getzels model was explanatory but it was also heuristic, and it stimulated numerous investigations by professors and graduate students (Getzels, Lipham, Campbell, 1968) and provided the conceptual framework for dozens of books and articles in the field of educational administration. The continuing vitality of the model can be felt in a recent and popular textbook by Hoy and Miskel (1982, p. 51-76). They organize their shaping view of the school as a social system around the model, and they use it as the core for a derivative (and somewhat clumsy)

new construct which also contains elements of bureaucracy, formal and informal organization, and traditional open systems theory. In short, it was a model with particularly broad applicability. Finally, it should be remembered that the model set comfortably in an intellectual tradition in the social sciences, and it drew from the discipline of social psychology which was to be a dominant influence on educational administration, particularly in the period from 1955-1970.

The Getzels model has not been without its critics. One argument has been advanced by Campbell (1981, p. 14) and echoed by Boyd and Crowson (1981):

> One can easily ask too much of a single model. Useful as are the concepts in the Getzels-Guba model, they do little to explain the external relationships of an organization. This is not stated to fault Getzels and Guba. Getzels and his colleagues gave some attention to this matter in what they called the cultural dimension. But the development of that dimension was left largely to others. Here political concepts were needed to supplement those in social psychology.

While this assessment would not receive much support from Katz and Kahn (1978)- who would hardly exclude the external environment from the purview of social psychologists- it does reflect a serious criticism. What these scholars seem to be saying is that the model may have been openiin intent but it was never operationalized by Getzels as an open systems model. Others have complained that because it was located in a logical positivist tradition the model tends to reify the concept of institution, although this was certainly not Getzel's intention. Still others have reacted to it as if it were grand theory or a paradigm and have been frustrated by its consequent limitations in that regard. It does not have the sense of outrage or intensity that often characterizes theory with a cutting edge and that can be felt in the earliest Getzels theorizing on the subject (1952). One can also wonder- following the Silver (1980-81) line of agrument- if the research

stimulated by the Getzels model led to the production of a certain body of knowledge that permits practitioners to solve important problems in schools and school systems. Of course, this same objection can be raised with respect to most educational administration theory developed since the advent of the theory movement.

There seems to be little doubt that the model has been refined and changed over the years by a scholar who has not abandoned his core ideas but who also has not been content with them in a static form. And, in fact, it is obvious that the revisions of the model in the early 1960's predicated rather than concurred with the shift from closed to open system perspectives. In its present state the model is comprehensive, encompassing the internal and external organizations, the closed and open views of organizational life and behavior. Why then has the earliest rendition of the model remained most closely associated with Getzels? Why has its interesting and stimulating transformation into an open system model been received less enthusiastically by scholars and practitioners? For one thing, while there may not have been much competition for the Getzels model in 1960, there is considerably more today. Then, too, there is the tendency among social scientists to search for the conceptually novel, the predilection for the current rather then the venerable construct. Nor can we dismiss the possibility that none of the revised Getzels models has received the attention and circulation of the original. All of these reasons have some appeal. However, they subside in the wake of the most attractive possibility--the real competition for the revised models was the original. For consumers in academia and in the field the first Getzels model possessed "the elegance and power of parsimony" which was never to be replaced with a certain comprehensiveness of view.

These caveats, however, do not diminish the intriguing significance of the process of transformation itself. Here is that too rare instance of a pioneering scholar in the social sciences, working within an established intellectual tradition, who persists in the molding of a set of ideas. In the theoretical contributions of Getzels we see the linkages between the past and present of the field of educational administration and possibly the shape of future paradigm whose absence is so greatly and generally deplored. The continuing transformation of the Getzels model is a topic that must prompt our attention and whet our curiosity.

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